

TANKER SITUATION

Irving Kabik

Two days after our surprise at Pearl Harbor, the United States and Germany had declared war on each other. These declarations were immediately followed by an intensive submarine campaign by the Axis off our Atlantic Seaboard. Our waters were soon infested and swarming with under-sea monsters whose toll, although our navy was soon on the job, was shockingly appalling from the very outset.

Our loss of ships, as the Germans certainly had intended them to be, were for the greater part, merchantmen and tankers, whose value to the war effort of our country was boundless and immeasurable.

Certainly, the American people were taken aback by the great numerical loss of ships and men, and by the proximity of the sinkings. Our ships were being sunk faster than replacements were being launched. The loss of these

ships was felt very severely, for shortly before we had entered the war, our government had lent a considerable number of tankers to the British, tankers for which we now had dire need.

Although our navy chiefs and the country's manufacturers knew well the importance of the tanker, the average citizen was more concerned with the nearness of the sinkings than with the type and number of ships sent down. These latter were taken with the complacent feeling that they could be swiftly and easily replaced or some other method of transportation would be resorted to.

The full meaning of these attacks on our merchantmen and tankers did not immediately strike home to our citizens, and especially to the citizens of our east coast, who were to be hit the hardest in the ensuing months. When America entered the war, the President of our country made clear to the Congress and the people what we should have to do. He placed special emphasis on production, and stressed

the fact that America would have to become the great arsenal of democracy.

Before any country can produce, however, there must be means of bringing in raw materials. After production there must be available methods of shipping and distributing the final product.

Two materials vital to any modern war effort are: smokeless powder which is used to keep gun placements from being easily sighted by the tell-tale smoke of firing; and oil, so vital to the running of any mechanized force.

Now a raw material for smokeless powder manufacture is sugar molasses, which is first converted into alcohol, this then being used directly in the manufacturing of the finished product. Almost all of the sugar molasses enters this country from our South American neighbors. Its only substantial means of importation is by tank boats, which hold on the average from one to two million gallons of the crude molasses.

the midwest to the east coast and there are also a few automotive and railroad tank cars bearing gasoline and oil to the east, but these are not sufficient in number or capacity. It is estimated that one tanker with its load of from one to three million gallons is equivalent in carrying oil to two thousand automotive tank cars; a large ratio also exists in the case of the railroad tanker, while the carrying in by pipeline is scant.

The tanker situation has become much worse since the fall of Java, for here Great Britain lost not only a large oil supply, necessitating a large importation by tanker from the United States, but also has lost her supply of Java sugar, Java being the world's second largest producer of sugar cane. Hence, Britain must look elsewhere for sugar molasses, which too is carried by tanker.

Since the United States has entered the war, we have lost by sinkings more than a score of tankers, while several others have been severely damaged. The result has

been that tankers are only carrying to the east coast eight hundred thousand barrels of crude oil per day. This is fifty percent substandard, which is considerable in light of the fact that tankers formerly carried in over ninety percent of the crude oil. The supply of sugar molasses has also been decreased which has precipitated a sugar rationing.

The only other substantial means of transportation for fluids is by railroad tanker, but they have proved their own inability in the case of oil. The oil industry since the large loss of tankers has resorted to railroad tank cars. Up to the present these have been able to bring in approximately four hundred and fifty thousand barrels a day, only twenty-six percent of our rising demands. The estimated limit of supply of oil to the east by rail is six hundred thousand barrels a day or roughly thirty-five percent of the demand.

These figures show conclusively that the tanker

only is the solution to the present oil and sugar molasses transportation problem. The tanker is vital to our war efforts. We must find means swiftly to eliminate the submarine hazard and conserve our tankers. At present the Maritime Commission has orders for three hundred and fifteen new tankers. We need these at once, and we must protect them at all costs. We need our tankers!